
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

PENTICTON STRONGSTART BC CENTRE OPEN FOR PRESCHOOLERS

PENTICTON – Penticton-Okanagan Valley MLA Bill Barisoff and Okanagan-Westside MLA Rick Thorpe joined Okanagan Skaha board of education chair Larry Little, parents, caregivers and district staff today at the official opening of the Province's StrongStart BC early learning centre at Queens Park elementary school.

"The new StrongStart BC centre is a testament to the spirit of community in Penticton," said Barisoff. "Local businesses, education partners, parents and caregivers have worked tirelessly to ensure there is a place for our children to gain the social and pre-literacy skills they need to prepare them for lifelong learning."

The StrongStart BC centre offers a free drop-in program for parents or caregivers and their children. Qualified early childhood educators will lead activities, including stories, music, and arts, to help children grow linguistically, physically and socially, and become comfortable in a school-like setting.

"StrongStart BC Centres are all about showing children how much fun school can be," said Thorpe. "They get to meet new friends, try new things, learn about numbers and letters, and get a jumpstart on what they'll learn in kindergarten."

All of B.C.'s 60 school districts have been offered the opportunity to participate in the StrongStart BC program. The Province is providing a total of \$5 million for up to 80 StrongStart BC centres as part ReadNow BC, the new provincial literacy plan.

"We know that more than one in four B.C. children enter kindergarten each year without being ready for success in school – that was close to 9,000 students this year – and that's just unacceptable," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "The Queens Park StrongStart BC centre will help prepare children in Penticton for successful learning in school and in life."

The Okanagan Skaha school district is receiving \$60,000 to operate the Queens Park elementary StrongStart BC centre. This includes \$20,000 to prepare the Queens Park elementary in-school space, including renovations and the purchase of new equipment and \$10,000 to fund this year's operating costs, including staff, supplies and healthy snacks. The school district will receive another \$30,000 for the second year of operation.

The Queens Park StrongStart BC centre currently has 42 children registered, with the district planning on expanding in the fall to accommodate demand from parents and caregivers wanting their children to benefit from the program.

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"What's truly exciting about the StrongStart BC Centre is that it will provide opportunities for preschool age children and their families to interact in a rich learning environment, as well as connect to the school and the extended community," said Little.

StrongStart BC centres help fulfil government's election platform and throne speech commitments to use underutilized school spaces as centres to deliver early learning services. Like the School Community Connections program that provides community access to existing underutilized school space, StrongStart BC early learning centres turn the challenge of declining enrolment into an opportunity.

The StrongStart BC centres help the Province reach its goal of making B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. Since 2001, government has invested over \$106 million in new literacy initiatives, including pre-literacy and early learning programs such as \$9.5 million to operate the kindergarten readiness program Ready, Set, Learn and \$2.7 million for the ActNow Literacy Education Activity and Play (LEAP BC) program that encourages literacy, physical activity and healthy eating in preschool-aged children.

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